Lister Sinclair

Good evening and welcome to *Ideas*. I'm Lister Sinclair. With program 10 in "The Education Debates." Tonight, a program about virtues and values.

Edward Andrew

The value lingo goes with a privatized lingo in which there are no common goods. All goods are to be understood as the values of particular consumers. And so I think the language of values necessarily privatizes what is common. So, to the extent that one considers education a value, as well as articulating education in terms of the language of value, one militates towards a consumerist, non-civic, way of looking at things.

Lister Sinclair

Talk about values pervades education. Some say that schools should convey society's values, others that they should confine themselves to helping students to form and clarify their own values. Either way, the existence of values is taken for granted. Tonight's program puts the idea itself into question, asking what is a value, where did the idea come from, and, finally, can values form the foundation of a moral education? The broadcast is Part 10 of "The Education Debates" by David Cayley.

David Cayley

I first learned to question the word 'values' from George Grant's 1969 Massey lectures, 'Time as History'. In his lectures, Grant argued that this word was first used in its contemporary sense by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche announced the death of God, and therefore the death of the idea that human beings live in a created order from which they can deduce their own proper purposes. He adopted the term 'values' to describe the new purposes that human beings would now have to create for themselves. Values, in Grant's view, were the language of human self-creation, reflecting the will to impose meaning on a world whose meaning was no longer given. A second clue to the meaning of values came from Ivan Illich. He argued, in an interview I did with him some years ago, that the idea of values constitutes an invasion of ethics by economics. Ethics, for Illich, represents what might be called grounded behaviour, what a given people in a given place have found, over time, to be good and fitting conduct. Values, by definition, are relative and changeable. So when proper conduct comes to be considered a question of values, he told me, it loses its grounding and becomes a matter of comparison and choice, like any economic decision.

Both these ideas, that values are migrants from economics, and that they reflect imposed rather than given purposes, are fleshed out in a recent book by Edward Andrew called <u>The Genealogy of Values</u>. Andrew is a professor of political philosophy at the University of Toronto and in his Genealogy he traces out the ancestry, birth and growth of this way of speaking and thinking. The idea that the good can be expressed in terms of values, he says, begins with the divorce of economics from moral and political philosophy.

Edward Andrew

Almost all political philosophers once considered economics an inherent part of moral philosophy. One or two such as Descartes weren't interested in political philosophy at all, but most political philosophers thought quite substantially about economic matters up to the time of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx. After that time, philosophers generally have not had any interest in economic discourse, but it's precisely from that time that values discourse has spilled over from the realm of economics into the realm of culture. Valuation uses the price mechanism. There's no way in which one can talk about values other

than in a relative context. There are no such things as absolute values. There are no such thing as values without evaluation. Values are always understood in terms of better or worse. They're always something we trade in. They're always something we exchange, that we're going to barter with. One stands on principles. One makes stands. The language values is not one of principled stands.

David Cayley
Values, Andrew argues, are inescapably the language of economics and particularly of the consumerist economics that emerged in the later 19th century. Up to the time of Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, he says, economics was based on a labour theory of value in which prices were seen as reflecting objective costs of production. Then, economics like Stanley Jevons, Karl Menger and Leon Walrus brought forward a new view. They argued that labour was worth only so much as consumers would pay for its products. In this new economics, the consumer's estimation of a product's utility to him at a given time became a key regulating principle. The same principle, according to Andrew, is embodied in the language of values. A value is a value because I say it is, and not because it is inherently good, or inherently reasonable.

Edward Andrew
Most people, when they talk about their values, do not expect to defend them rationally. To say these are my values is to indicate that I'm a civilized guy. It's an ornamentation. I think the language of values is not an invitation to dialogue or discussion or conversation. It is an emphasis, if one likes, on the sanctity of what you espouse, because you espouse it. It's your espousing, your affirmation, your evaluation, your actively willing this set of principles that gives it its power.

David Cayley
What is the alternative to a language of values?

Edward Andrew
A language of love. Anything you love isn't a value. And so I say in my book, if you hear a conversation going on in which one person says to another, "I value you highly", you know that that person doesn't love the other person, that she's telling him that she thinks quite highly of his body or maybe even some of his qualities of character, but she's bored and she's moving on. And I think the same holds in other cases. If we say, I value philosophy or I value health or something like that, it indicates it's not something that one really needs, it's not something that's really essential to one's being. So I think that the language of values is a language of relative estimation, it doesn't describe something that is really essential. And so, to get back to education, I think the really important thing for all educators is to indicate what they love. By far the most important educational experience of my life was when I was in university and stumbled into a philosophy course and the prof. was BS-ing about God or free will or something, and he stumbled over a chair, and he apologized to the chair. And this was just mind-blowing to me, that here was a guy who was so engrossed in what he was doing that he was not aware of the audience reactions. He was not an 18th century man. He was really utterly engaged in what he was doing. And this, to me, was just great and made me want to follow up philosophy. I just saw that this was a guy doing philosophy; and, when the class all laughed, he didn't know what they were laughing about. But anyway, I thought that was great, and I think it's important for educators to get across to the kids that there are some things that they really love.

David Cayley
What is present in love that is not present in evaluating, esteeming, deciding for?

Edward Andrew

Well, closeness, first of all. I mean, seeing things from the inside. Values are always seen from the outside. If you're talking about the value of various religions and you're comparing them and doing some sort of comparative religion, you're not trying to evaluate the experience of revelation as it appears to an individual. So I think the language of value is never the language of an insider, and I think it is probably more worthwhile for educators to try to elicit what is inside kids and try to understand where they're coming from, what their traditions are.

David Cayley

The idea that values are an outsider's appraisal and not an insider's expression of belonging suggests that values have an objective, as well as a subjective dimension. According to Andrew, values talk tends to oscillate between subjectivity and objectivity. Values are subjective insofar as they manifest my identity or my self estimate, but also objective insofar as they can be developed, promoted and changed. Andrew argues that this instability in values language results from the inadequacy of dividing the world into subjects and objects in the first place. He follows George Grant in supposing that life lived receptively, and within accepted limits, cannot be satisfactorily described in terms of subjects and objects or facts and values.

Edward Andrew

Grant brings forth the experience that the language of science, the language of subjects and objects out of which we get the world of scientific facts and, conversely, the subjective language of values opposing it, does not describe a world that people live in. The world is neither objective nor subjective, and we have to convert a world of things that are around us into scientific objects by stripping them of all their qualities and then we project back onto those things those qualities that we call values. And so it's a reduction of familiar things to a world of objects and then a re-projection of qualitative aspects onto them which are said to come out of the subjectivity of the individual, which we call values. But I think this is alien to the experience of kids who don't normally think of subjectivity or objectivity, values or facts.

David Cayley

It is because students do not arrive at university speaking the language of facts and values that Andrew thinks it's so important for teachers to share with students what they love, rather than adopting the posture of objectivity. He was himself led towards philosophy by the teacher so immersed in the love of his subject that he apologized to a chair. Without love to point us towards what is inherently worthwhile, we are left with values. And values, as Andrew has argued, are contingent, idiosyncratic and changeable. They have nothing common, essential or universal about them. Values, he writes, are projections of the imagination, not receptions of the intelligence. They are created by unique acts of will rather than discovered by our common reason. Because of this arbitrary, unstable quality, Andrew argues that values cannot serve as a sure foundation for public education or any other civic enterprise that depends on our believing that as citizens we possess a common good. Values, he says finally, should be restricted to the sphere from which they came and in which they belong.

Edward Andrew

I think the language of values is appropriately the language of the marketplace, a place of relative estimation, where you're placing things in equilibrium and saying that they're better or worse. It's not appropriate to a polity where we should have unshakeable principles. There are some things that are intolerable. If we talk about the value of liberty, then it's always something to be traded off against some other thing. Do we want to perhaps reinstate slavery? We know that Walmart is the highest growth

industry in North America. They use Chinese convict labour, and there may be all sorts of good grounds for reintroducing slave labour. We've got Mike Harris promoting workfare, which is slave labour. So this is a trendy thing. And we might well see that there are good economic purposes for it. Slavery becomes an option when we talk about the value of liberty as just one good to be weighed in relation to others. The alternative is to take liberty as a principle. As I said, I think we stand on principles, we trade on values. So I think the language of values is always a slippery language. George Grant talked about what happens when we replace the sanctity of life with talk about the quality of life or the value of life. When we're talking about the value of life, then we have to assess what life means in relation to other goods. Think how much it costs taxpayers to keep old geezers, like myself, alive. I mean, half the budget of the OHIP goes to keep people alive in the last year of their life. If we just snuffed them a year from the end, then we'd have all that extra money for wonderful things. I mean, if we're employing the language of values, we're encouraged to think in this way, to start trading off one good for another.

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David Cayley
Ed Andrew defines values as willed meanings. They are projections of the self, rather than an opening to qualities inherent in the world. If we take technology in its broadest sense, it might be said that they represent a technology of the self. They assert our freedom and our mastery of our circumstances, rather than an openness to things as they are. The inner link between values and technology has been explored by Peter Emberley in his book Values, Education and Technology: The Ideology of Dispossession. Emberley is a professor at Ottawa's Carleton University and the Director of the College of the Humanities, a college within a college at Carleton, in which students follow a common curriculum of great books. In his book, he examines various approaches to values education and finds that their common purpose is to foster autonomy, empowerment and self-esteem. What is missing, for him, is the more patient, more receptive attitude that is able to let things declare their own meaning in their own time. It's a lack that he says he felt keenly from the very beginning of his own schooling.

Peter Emberley
As I was growing up, I think probably my deepest pleasures came from reading. I could hide myself away in my bedroom and read for hours and hours and just be immersed in what I thought was a magical world. I didn't necessarily see this as an escape from the outside world. In fact, it reinforced my experiences of the outside world. And as I started to meet more and more people in my travels, I discovered there are a lot of people who take such enormous joy in reading books and being transformed by those books and being very receptive. Not always just being critical, but also being receptive to experiences that authors explored. And I should say, too, that this was completely out of sync with my schooling. I began high school in the mid-sixties and the continuous focus in the classroom was on critical detachment, on developing a certain degree of autonomy and judging, often very severely, the world around us in the name of freedom. There was also a great emphasis on not hiding yourself away in a book but being continually active. And I always thought that schooling spawned a kind of restlessness. So these were two parts of my life that just didn't seem to have any compatibility with one another. When I first started writing a little bit about education I tried to, I suppose, legitimate or justify some of my own experiences in reading books and some of my discomfort in being out of sync with what often happened in the classroom as I was growing up. But also, through that, I was reflecting some of the conversations I've had with many people of my age who felt that their schooling had deprived them somewhat of a richness of experience which they had expected to find in the schools and also, later, in the universities and often didn't happen. And this criticism always seemed to circulate around the idea that the schooling we received in the sixties and seventies was always a lesson that said, be

autonomous, be free, create your own values and be highly critical of everything, be suspicious of everything. The idea that somehow our task as human beings is to reverence life or to be simply open and receptive to experiences that we may only partly intimate just was so outside of the pale. It was seen as passivity, it was seen as somehow blameworthy to feel that that was what life is about.

David Cayley

The idea that we create our own values is what Peter Emberley calls 'the ideology of dispossession.' He argues that the language of values moves towards a condition without horizon, a condition of restless incompletion and endless overcoming in which belonging--to others, to places, to things--is experienced as unwelcome limitation. Self-possession, as reflected by 'my values,' is heightened but the things that surround me are increasingly drained of their accumulated meanings by my self-determining power. Yet it is through things, Emberley argues, that the world becomes our home. So the language of values tends to produce a condition of homelessness or dispossession. He first began to appreciate how things embody belonging, he says, as a traveller.

Peter Emberley

One of the things I observed when I travelled a great deal throughout Europe and Asia is that travellers always seem to carry with them little fetishes. They're often little memorabilia from home. And those are very important because, while the wandering and the kind of dissolution that travel brings is, I think, absolutely essential to a human life, it's also important to have a memory. It's important to have a little cosmos that constitutes and comprises home and a sense of belonging. And these fetishes that travellers often carry are precisely that. They're a little anchor. And it led me to think more about the place of things in our life. And, of course, in thinking of that it's impossible not to reflect on Heidegger's beautiful essay, 'The Thing' and his distinction between things and objects. Objects are what we control and manipulate, what ultimately has no meaning to us apart from our ability to use them up or to control them in a certain way. A thing, on the other hand, we reverence in some way. Things, for example, constitute a memory for us. They provide us with a story and with a narrative of ourselves and of our experiences. So that's really where it began, thinking about the difference between things and objects and how important it is to have a home, and to have a sense of belonging, and to have things that comprise a narrative for one. And it seemed to me that so much of our contemporary culture and so much of the ethos that we were being asked to imbibe was rendering the world simply that of objects to be controlled and used up.

David Cayley

Emberley connects this world of disposable objects with the dominion of values. Values express the morality of a world that belongs to us, rather than a world to which we belong. He came to see the connection, he says, as he explored various models of values education. Values education, sometimes called values clarification, appeared in the 1960s as a substitute for the explicit religious and moral instruction that was then beginning to disappear from schools. Its proponents presented it as an alternative to what one apostle of the new approach called 'the immorality of morality.' In place of authoritarian moralizing, on the model of 'Thou Shalt Not,' there was to be free and open discussion of competing value postulates. The goal was to help students gain confidence in their autonomous judgements and attune them to a sense of existence as continuous becoming. But the more Emberley studied these models of values education, the more he saw the world being swallowed up by the sovereign self.

Peter Emberley

All of these models seemed to have one direction and that was to abandon the notion that there is anything that is stable, that there is anything that constitutes a foundation for our moral beliefs and our moral actions. And I thought that in some ways the syndrome that I was examining in these models of values education reproduced the issue of things simply having become objects, namely this great distancing from anything that is foundational, anything that is stable, any idea that the world around us has a kind of proportionality and a harmony and a structure that somehow gives us a sense that we're at home here and that it's not just all stuff to be managed and manipulated. And then, having gone from things to our moral lives I took the further step of examining intellectual life. During the time I was working on that book, deconstructionism and post-modernism were playing a large part in the intellectual and scholarly world of the universities in Canada, and I was struck by the recurrence, in the thought of Jacques Derrida and Bataille and Foucault, of dispossession, of not wanting the self to be something that is stable and that has a kind of continuity of time, of abandoning the notion that we need narrative in favour of a far more episodic and, I think, very radical notion of the freedom of the human being. And again, it struck me that the notion of the intellectual life as receptivity to the inherent order of the cosmos was being abandoned entirely. So, while I have great sympathy with many themes that one finds in post-modernism and deconstruction, I think ultimately the abandonment of the idea that, as human beings, our task is to receive or to be in alignment with something that is not of our own making, that comprises somehow the order of the cosmos, I think the abandonment of that is very dangerous and quite unpalatable. That's really why I coined this expression, 'the ideology of dispossession' because I saw a certain continuity through our entire culture from the most immediate thing of things and objects, all the way to our intellectual and spiritual lives, of abandoning entirely the notion of stability.

David Cayley

And how does the idea of values fit into that?

Peter Emberley

Well, I suppose the immediate source of that language is American pragmatism and, through American pragmatism, the work of the French existentialists and I guess, through that, Friedrich Nietzsche. And that language is a language very much of empowerment. It's a language that speaks of values having no basis ultimately in the cosmos, in the structure of our souls, in what we share as human beings, but being, rather, the product of our own making ability and the product of our own imagination. And to be clear, as somebody who is very, very receptive to Christian philosophy and particularly the work of St. Augustine, I think that free choice is absolutely essential to what we are as human beings. But having said that, I think that the language of values just goes too far. I mean, values are those things which ultimately are utterly arbitrary. They express in some way our desire and our ability to control and to entirely write our own destiny. And I think that that constitutes a kind of dispossession. People ultimately can't find satisfaction in a world like that. I say that now particularly from the vantage point, many years after having written that book, of writing a book on the spiritual searches of Canada's baby boomers who are an entire generation that was brought up in the schools and universities of Canada on the modern, pragmatic, existentialist view that values are what we are and that our entire lives comprise a restless search for imposing order on the chaos around us, which requires a continuous decision-making and subjecting all aspects of our lives to constant critical scrutiny. And I've observed in the same generation an enormous desire to abandon all that and to find gurus and to find ministers and to find rabbis who will lead their spiritual development rather than forcing the obligations and responsibilities of making choices on themselves. So it strikes me that one has to recognize that there are truths that aren't of our own

making, there are experiences that well up in us as part of our humanity that aren't just values, that aren't just arbitrary and that don't just reflect our desire to control and to master the world around us.

David Cayley
In what sense do you describe values as an aspect of technology?

Peter Emberley
Well, in this, I've of course been very informed by George Grant's work on the relationship between values and technology, work that resonates deeply with what Heidegger also says about values and technology. But generally, I think that the language of values and the form of consciousness that we associated with the expansion of technology and the expansion of our ability to master and control the environment around us, including the human environment, I think that these two languages resonate deeply with one another, that they replicate each other's logic and that they reinforce one another. I think that Heidegger has pointed us in a very important direction when he says that technology is primarily a desire to control and master and to subdue the world around us, that it is the way in which human beings assert themselves, possibly even make themselves like gods in their view that they can extend grace to themselves and create the conditions of their own lives, with dramatic consequences for the environment and human life and social life and so on. And I think that the language of values very much reproduces the worldview Heidegger associates with technology. The language of values springs out of a very credible and very serious tradition, initially Christian and then liberal, which is the language of individual responsibility, which is the language of individuals really choosing the limits on their action. But that language has been radicalized and now suggests that there are simply no patterns in the world to which we need to accommodate, that our task as human beings is not to balance the plurality of goods that comprise our various human searches, but instead to just carve out our own story, carve out our own narrative, carve out our own destiny. This language is rooted in the experience that everything that's out there is just stuff. And this is an idiomatic expression and colloquial expression that many people use. You run across them and you say, well, what are you carrying? Stuff. What are you thinking? Stuff. This is a word that resonates with both the language of values and the language of technology, that everything is just stuff. Human passions are just stuff. The world of nature is just stuff and we control it and we master it and we dominate it and subdue it. And that's why I think values and technology in some ways are very closely interlaced with one another. An older language of ethics and morality, which we use interchangeably with the word 'values,' might reacquaint us with the idea that as human beings we do have a being and that being is associated with the world of which we're a part and our task is, in some way, to come to understand it rather than to control it.

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David Cayley
Peter Emberley contrasts the language of values with the older language of morals, but he also notes that the two are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday conversation. One often hears, for example, of Christian values, though it would seem that the Biblical view of humanity as part of a God-given order stands utterly opposed to the idea that people generate values. This raises the question: What's in a word? If someone uses the word 'values' to refer to fixed moral principles, then isn't that just what values are to that person? I would say, not quite, because values is a word with a history, and that history establishes values, first of all, as comparisons or appraisals and, second, as existential choices or personal commitments with no grounds outside of the individual. Using the term to refer to inherent goods, or inherent rights is always an attempt to have it both ways. It's either an attempt to give preferences the sterner appearance of principles or, alternately, to give principles the more agreeable

character of mere personal preferences.

The difference between values, on the one hand, and morals, rights or principles on the other is a significant one for education. In the past, the formation of moral character was seen as one of the central purposes of public education, but more recently this purpose has tended to disappear from public school, along with the religious education with which moral education was once closely associated. The substitute, where there has been a substitute, has been values education. But in the view of Iain Benson, it has been an inadequate replacement. Benson is a constitutional lawyer who lives in British Columbia. He has appeared before the Supreme Court and is the founder of the Centre for the Renewal of Public Policy, an organization which has tried to bring traditional accounts of virtue, morality and justice to bear on current political questions. In one of his Centre's recent publications, Benson points to the British Columbia Minister of Education's Career and Personal Planning program as an example of why values cannot sustain morality. Students in this program are encouraged to rank their values from physical attractiveness to "achieving something special". Teachers are told in an accompanying advisory that judging values is not appropriate. The students' assertions of what they care about justify themselves insofar as they are expressions of autonomy or self-esteem. What is wrong with this approach, Benson writes, is that it leaves the student without any sense that moral choices have any systematic relationship with happiness or the living of a good life. "In such a setting", he goes on, "the banal, trivial and bizarre are placed on a par with the noble and worthwhile," and the teacher is expressly told not to make the distinctions which are, in fact, the very essence of education.
In the remainder of tonight's program, Benson makes the case for restoring the moral foundations of education. Without such a restoration, he argues, life in contemporary societies will grow increasingly insecure and therefore increasingly repressive.

Iain Benson

We're uncomfortable with the restrictions of morality, broadly construed, or religion. But these are the things which, over time, the great thinkers say actually make us free. A state that doesn't understand freedom has to have more and more law and becomes less and less free. If you don't teach civility between men and women, civil conduct, respect, you're going to have to have a proliferation of tribunals. And we're seeing that. Tribunals in the workplace to deal with what? To deal with outrageous conduct. Why is there outrageous conduct? People aren't taught how to act. Take an example close to home for me--the Bowen Island Ferry. A sign appears on the washrooms saying that every day on the 3:25 sailing, the washroom will be locked because of vandalism from the school children coming home. Now, what a fascinating insight into how we attempt to deal with the problem of incivility, you know, with bad conduct. Rather than looking at the root causes and asking why are these children behaving like barbarians, why aren't they dealt with and taught, really taught how to behave, we lock the door of the bathrooms, thereby inconveniencing everybody using the ferry. Well, that locking the door of the bathroom approach, to avoid moral analysis and moral response, is becoming a real social problem. So we don't even notice the extent to which our civil life is fraying. Bicycle locks which in some countries were unnecessary are now absolutely required. Houses are locked, cars locked, double locked. "Clubs" are put on because the door locks are insufficient. The mechanisms of the state to cope with a gradual rise of incivility, which is what all this is, increase around us so slowly, so subtly, we don't even see it. In England, where I was fairly recently, in the area I was visiting, a nice area, every single person I met had been burgled in the past year. Every home we stayed in had burglar alarms. It was absolutely normal to have these alarm systems. And in South Africa - admittedly one's moving here a quantum leap in social problems - but in South Africa, where I have relatives, they have armed response security guards who come over your wall with Uzis. Now, the Bowen Island washroom is along way from an Uzi,

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but the human disconnection from virtue, from civility, is part of a spectrum.

David Cayley
Benson associates this disconnection from virtue with the displacement of religion from public life. The ostensible reason for this displacement was the multicultural, multireligious character of society, but with the disappearance of religion from public life, he says, has come timidity and tentativeness about the questions religion once addressed.

Iain Benson
An interesting thing has happened in, really, a relatively short time, particularly in the West. And that is a growing insecurity about the place of religion in relation to culture. We've tended to drive it out of our public discourse, drive it out of our public schools, out of the debates in Parliament. And yet if you even look at buildings made in Canada relatively recently, or look at university mottos, those tend to resonate or point towards some conviction about not only an objective moral order but that this objective moral order is in a sense given, its a gift, comes to us as part of the nature of things. The removal of this sense of contingency - that humans are contingent on the gift of creation - has had devastating effects for us because we literally become our own gods. Because everybody worships. You see, in the traditions—Judaism, Christianity—the first two commandments are directed towards idolatry, not towards worship or non-worship. And I think that's extremely important. Everybody in this society around us—all of us, you, me, everyone—functionally worships something. Whatever they put in a position of ultimacy, in their life and orient their life towards is, for them, their god. Structurally. Now, how robust their worship is, how conscious their commitment to that end or that god, whether it's G or g, or if you want to call it 'ultimate principle' or something, that'll vary from person to person. But the idea that only those who are consciously religious or who express this fidelity or focus in religious terminology are religious in that worshipping sense is erroneous because, in fact, what we see is a commitment, a dedication of each human life to those things it thinks most important. And that is, for each person, their own religious structure. Now, obviously, if we were to look at history, the history of Christianity gave a reference for groups of people, large groups of people, to orient their shared endeavours around a set of shared religious principles expressed in ritual and liturgy and shared religions norms, Thou Shalt Nots and so forth, as well as a shared vision of wherein freedom lay. And if we lose, on a general level, the sense of a shared goal, a shared end, we become increasingly fragmented from each other, unless we can begin again to realize the extent to which what we're doing or ought to be doing is comparing our most ultimate ideas together. If we avoid that discussion by pigeonholing religion as over there, religion—those are religious people, I am not religious—and use the language of secularism as a means of avoiding an encounter between ultimate claims, whether they're inchoate or expressed, we avoid dealing with the reality which is that all of us will, in how we live, manifest our dedication and commitment to some end.

David Cayley
Iain Benson's motive in defining religion as ultimate commitment rather than as dogmatic belief is to open the way for dialogue on the most important questions. At the moment, he says, insecurity about religion is leading to a rapid demoralization of public education. Educational authorities, afraid that moral questions will prove too difficult or too divisive, abdicate their authority and preach only tolerance and the right to choose one's own lifestyle. The result, in Benson's view, is a moral vacuum.

Iain Benson
Somehow, we're trying to create an educated student that hasn't been taught anything formally by the state, who now runs education, about religion and its importance to culture, or about morality being

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rooted in some reality that transcends the person. We cannot, in a society, expect allegiance to exterior standards, if we haven't taught students that right and wrong, truth, goodness is something that is, in a sense, bigger than themselves. Their adherence to it is very important, but they don't make it themselves. What's right for you, if right means anything, is also right for me. The question then is how robust a sense of rightness are we going to have? But public education at the moment has backed off that. It's afraid of that encounter. Why? I think the answer is that for a long, long time in Western education, in France, England, the U.S. and Canada--writers have written about this--we've started to separate moral teaching, spiritual teaching from formal education. And those are the frameworks within which much of the guidance of the young, in terms of character, was presented. Now we're trying to educate young people with a much diminished framework of values, subjectively, personally defined, tolerance and so forth. Values and tolerance, and perhaps dignity of the person, which is underlying our notion of tolerance, seem to be the pillars upon which we're trying to build an entire social order. But it doesn't take much thinking to realize that that's impossible.

David Cayley

The reason it's impossible, according to Benson, is that tolerance gives no guidance about what to reject and "values" no sense of what is good. Unpack a value, Benson says, and it turns out to be either a groundless preference putting on moral airs or a moral postulate trying to make himself appear less demanding than it really is. The only way out of this predicament, he thinks, is to give up this slippery way of speaking and thinking and confront the question of morality directly. What holds us back, he says, is fear.

Iain Benson

We're afraid of what we don't know. And one of the things that most of us don't know is the grounding of morality. We weren't taught it, so we fear it. We fear that if we start to open the door towards moral education, we're going to open the door to those horrible fundamentalists who are going to ram their narrow vision of right and wrong down our throat. I don't see why that's the case. Surely we have the knowledge, the reason, the objectivity and the insight to be able to craft a curriculum which spells out a core of principles which are extremely important for society and which don't offend religious communities, for example, or atheist parents. And I'm speaking here of what used to be known as the Cardinal Virtues. What religious tradition thinks moderation is bad? Answer: None, except perhaps fringe groups that want to hurl themselves off cliffs as a sign of devotion, but in any case, leave that aside. Moderation, also known as temperance, justice, wisdom, also known as prudence, and courage. Those provided the groundwork for human conduct, for virtue to form. I don't think those virtues properly presented in Canadian society or any Western culture, ought to offend our understanding of pluralism. And what we at the Centre want to do is, in a careful, measured way, bring back into our general understanding this language of virtue. Because it's extremely important for all of us.

David Cayley

Virtues, in Iain Benson's view, are alternatives to values. They are aspects of a moral order that is larger than the individual and so, unlike values, they are systematically related to one another. Each virtue depends on other virtues to function harmoniously. Courage without wisdom might be mere rashness, honesty without discretion cruelty, justice without humility self-righteousness. Virtues, unlike values, must be co-ordinated. What stands in the way of the recovery of this language, in Benson's view, is a feeling that virtue is antique, authoritarian and unfitted to pluralistic or multicultural modern societies. But that depends on how we construe pluralism, he says.

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One of the main missions of his Centre for the Renewal of Public Policy has been the promotion of what he calls 'a meaningful pluralism' and with this account he concludes tonight's program.

Iain Benson

With respect to pluralism, I think we've got essentially two broad categories--what, for the sake of brevity, can be called 'relativistic pluralism' and what can be called 'principled pluralism.' The default is relativistic pluralism where values language dominates, where one group vies for power with another. This involves a post-modern recognition that there are no objective goods, and that any reaching towards objective goods is just wishful thinking. Everything's corroded, there's no point talking about anything beyond simply power politics, any affirmation of belief is simply one's emotional response to something. On the other side is the view that, no, in fact, if you look into the plural nature, the multitudinous nature of community groups and people, we actually have certain commonalities. And we look right back to the Greeks. People want to be happy. They long towards meaning, happiness. Insofar as they abandon the quest for meaning and purpose, we see a diminution in the quality of their life. Therefore, the quest towards God, the longing for the fullness that these different religions all speak of in different languages-- and some don't even talk about God; they talk about ultimacy in some form, whether it's enlightenment or what have you--that longing has within it, expressed in many, many different categories, core principles of respect, of honesty, of integrity and so forth which are not only essential to common life but are essential to our own self-understanding and meaning as persons. Now, it seems to me that principled pluralism, identified that way, when seen alongside relativistic pluralism, creates two very different kinds of societies. Within relativistic pluralism the individual monad or isolated self is going to, in a sense, bounce around with groupings, commitments and so forth that are haphazard, unseen, unidentified. The beautifully resonant notion of friendship will be undeveloped, faith will be undeveloped, religious covenants will be undeveloped - all these things which can teach us so much about what we are as human beings. On the other side, principled pluralism can give us, with an openness to these traditions, a tremendous depth to all these categories that we live anyway. Human beings live in friendship relationships. Whether they see them as friendships, whether they start to understand what friendship used to consist of will depend on what they're taught about the traditions. But if we foreclose the place of tradition, the shared commonality of human nature from our ground understanding of pluralism, the default, every time is relativistic pluralism. The result will be fragmentation and ultimately nihilism with increasing state power necessary to maintain order. The less the citizens are self-governed, the more they need to be governed by the state, the more law proliferates, the less genuine freedom there is of the citizenry. If I can trust my neighbours and the people with whom I live to respect property, I don't have to lock my car, I don't have to lock my home. If, however, I cannot trust them because they will not respect me and my rights and my property, then I have to lock up. And we're seeing this locking up on many, many levels of our culture because of the default of relativistic pluralism. From the highest levels in law, politics, religion, and education, we hear this language. We need to learn that principled pluralism about what we share in common as human beings is the only way forward for a generally pluralistic society. When we set our sails into pluralism we have to follow through with principle, otherwise the default is relativism.

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Lister Sinclair

On *Ideas* tonight, you've heard Part 10 of "The Education Debates" by David Cayley. Our series continues tomorrow night with a program about multiculturalism, featuring philosopher Charles Taylor.